

The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

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DEAR MEMBER,

The Report of the Commission appointed by the British Council of Churches on the Era of Atomic Power, an account of which was given in C.N.-L. No. 260, had a good press in the sense that it received extensive notice in the leading national and provincial newspapers and was commented on in a number of weekly and monthly journals. It was very fully discussed in a long leading article in *Nature*, which was reprinted in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Chicago). A talking point has thus been established between Churchmen and scientists. All the larger Churches have referred the Report to Committees for further consideration. A study outline on the Report, containing a list of books for further reading, has been issued by the Student Christian Movement for use among students and youth organizations.¹

Verdicts on the Report reveal the widest diversity of opinion. The Bishop of Bristol (better known as Canon F. A. Cockin), for example, writes in an article in the *Church of England Newspaper* that the Report is "a document which brings to bear upon the subject some of the best and most radical Christian thinking in the country, and which, it is safe to say, will provide any serious reader with material for further reflection for the next few years at least", and he adds that, if the British Council of Churches had never done anything else, "it would have justified its existence by the production of this Report." The Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge (Professor Charles E. Raven) on the other hand, in the *Christian Pacifist*, finds the contents of the Report "tragically depressing" (in the sense that the Report is terribly sad evidence of a lack of leadership in the Church), and the Society of Socialist Clergy and Ministers in a pamphlet attacking the Report reaches the conclusion that "it is at once a betrayal of Christian morality, an instrument of reaction, and a stumbling-block on the road to world peace".

CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

The criticism which the Report has received in Church circles, has tended to fasten on the chapter on "Modern Warfare and the Christian Conscience", which has been discussed in isolation from

¹ S.C.M., Annandale, North End Road, London, N.W. 11. Price 4d.

the rest of the Report of which it is an integral part. Its object was to show that modern war, when it is joined on what appears to be a plain moral issue, confronts Christians with an impossible choice. Critics have charged the Commission with indecision and lack of leadership for failing to come down uncompromisingly on the side which the particular critic espouses. But the position adopted by the Commission was a positive, not a negative one. It maintained that, while modern methods of warfare have made participation in war intolerable for the Christian conscience, the complete renunciation of war is also not a position in which in existing conditions the Christian mind can find rest; and that, consequently, instead of allowing our energies to be dissipated in fruitless debate, in which two equally binding Christian obligations are set in opposition to one another, we should concentrate our efforts on working for a society in which the insanity of modern war has been overcome and scientific discovery and technical advance have ceased to be dangerous, because they have been subordinated to the true ends of life.

In regard to the *means* of war, the mind of the Commission was far removed from that of the *Church Times*, which remarks complacently in a leading article that "most Churchmen are satisfied that the use of force, even in the terrifying forms supplied by modern artillery and aircraft, is legitimate where the maintenance of justice and of Christian civilization is at stake", and that "if that be so, there can be nothing in principle objectionable in the employment of atomic energy". Could there be greater insensitivity to both human and Christian values or deeper blindness to the issues for the future of mankind involved in the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima? To the Commission there seemed to be no room for doubt that, in so far as war becomes "total", and attack is directed not against armies, but against whole peoples by methods of mass destruction, "the restraints in waging war which have been regarded by the Christian tradition as essential to a 'just' war disappear"; that, the question has to be asked afresh "whether the destruction of an entire population is not an act so absolutely wrong in itself that no Christian can assent to it or share in it".

On the other hand, the Commission refused to evade the question by what means in the *political* sphere human liberties and public law can be defended against aggression and tyranny. It would greatly help the Christian discussion of these questions, if those who take the pacifist position would distinguish more clearly than they commonly do between the religious imperative and the hard problems of the political arena, and frankly admit that for these they have no better solution to propose than others. When a man asserts that war is so destructive of all that he values as a Christian that he can have no part in it, and claims that his loyalty

to the truth as he sees it may, in the providence of God, in ways not immediately perceptible, contribute to the ultimate well-being of human society, his stand commands respect. But it is quite another thing to claim that the course which he is impelled on religious grounds to take is necessarily the one which, in a society actuated in the main by other than Christian motives, is best calculated to preserve peace. Until pacifists are willing to recognize that in the world as it actually is the *political* effect of their attitude, in proportion as it is widely adopted, may be to provoke war rather than to avert it, they are not facing real issues.

The focussing of discussion on what the Commission said, or is supposed to have said, about the Christian attitude to war has diverted attention from what it was the chief concern of the Commission to assert. The central assertion of the Report is that, so long as the prevailing assumptions regarding human life and destiny remain unchanged, the best efforts to establish control over atomic energy may prove ineffective. The fundamental need, therefore, is for a change of mind. The Commission was quite clear about the directions in which such a change is needed. To bringing about this change, each of us has it in his power to make a real contribution.

THE RENEWAL OF DEMOCRACY

But it will not be sufficient, the Commission further insisted, for this change to take place in the outlook and attitude of individuals, though that is the indispensable beginning. It can become effective in society only by becoming incarnated in political institutions and leavening the material system of organization and power which is the inescapable setting of man's life on earth. The immediate task to which we have to address ourselves is to conserve and develop the democratic institutions through which power has progressively been brought under social control and made subservient to the ends of justice. It is for this reason that, as one of our correspondents of the Christian News-Letter insists, "the major politic-social issue of the present is whether democracy can survive." Another calls attention to the conflict in men's minds between their personal moral obligations and the demands made on them by the organized community of which they are members. "Such periodicals," he writes, "as the *Listener* and the *New Statesman* involve their readers in a ceaseless and seemingly inconclusive discussion concerning the rival claims on the individual of a morality concerned with personal integrity rather than the communal well-being and a political action that would make its effectiveness on the plane of conflicting power its sole justification. The claim of our democratic society to have achieved some kind of synthesis of spirituality and power is not even considered."

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

The question of the renewal of democratic faith and democratic institutions cannot be pursued very far without leading to the question of the relations of the western democracies with Russia. It is on this question, next to the attitude taken to war, that the main attack on the Report of the Commission has come. In the *Daily Worker* the Report was front-page news, and the headline splashed across the whole breadth of the first page was "Churches' Atom Threat to Russia". The main theme of a pamphlet issued by the Society of Socialist Clergy and Ministers is that the Report is inspired by a strong anti-Russian bias, and the charge is supported by copious quotations, some of which had, in the intention of the Commission, no specific reference to Russia.

The treatment in the Report of so many-sided a question was certainly too compressed to do full justice to the subject, and in the pamphlet criticizing the Report questions are raised which undoubtedly need fuller examination. The primary concern of the Commission was to ask what are the forces which are promoting the health or hastening the decay of society, and it was in this context that the revival of democracy as a synthesis between power and morality was considered. Russia could not fail to come into the picture because the differences between the western and eastern conceptions of democracy are unmistakable and acute. Some of the attitudes which the Commission regard as inimical to the growth of a healthy society are openly espoused and advocated by communists as, for example, contempt for factual truth in propaganda, a steadfast refusal even to admit that there is a problem of means and a denial that power must be made subservient to moral law. These are things which Christians must not shrink from denouncing, wherever they are practised, whether in communist or capitalist countries. Nothing is gained by silence about such vital issues.

But strongly as this needs to be said, it must be asserted with equal emphasis that nothing is more contrary to the Christian understanding of reality, as is pointed out in the Supplement, than to suppose that in the conflict of power and present political tension between Russia and the West, right is necessarily all on one side. To fight uncompromisingly for the things which Christianity has taught us to value is not only compatible with, but necessarily includes, a determined and patient effort to understand the Russian point of view where it differs from our own and to promote to the utmost co-operation between the two peoples.

Yours sincerely,

D. A. Deane

THE CONTROL OF ATOMIC ENERGY

The Commission on the Era of Atomic Power did not attempt to discuss the question of the political control of atomic energy. To have done so would have required a knowledge of scientific and technical facts and possibilities which the Commission did not possess, and which was not at that time available to the general public. Since the publication of the Report much fresh light has been shed on this vital matter, and the purpose of this Supplement is to present a summary of the present position.

THE REPORT OF THE BOARD OF CONSULTANTS

A Report to the American Department of State by a Board of Consultants was published last March.¹ The Board consisted of five members, possessing the highest scientific and technical attainments, who for a period of weeks devoted their entire time to the task and were given unlimited access to all relevant facts and activities. Their Report was at once recognized as setting the whole problem of control of the atomic bomb in a new light. It made clear that the difficulties of bringing atomic energy under effective control are not insuperable, if the will to solve them is there. The authors of the Report confessed that, while they had begun their task with a feeling almost of despair, they concluded it with a sense of hope and confidence.

The proposals for control hinge, first, on the assumption, which is supported by an overwhelming weight of scientific opinion, that uranium is the only natural substance that can maintain a chain reaction, and is the key to all foreseeable applications of atomic energy;² and secondly, on the fact that the fissionable materials U. 235 and plutonium can be "denatured" in such a way that they do not readily lend themselves to the making of atomic explosives, but can be used without any essential loss of effectiveness for the peaceful applications of atomic energy. This fact makes it possible to draw a broad distinction between "safe" and "dangerous" activities.

It would be impracticable to vest in an international agency a monopoly of control over *all* uses of atomic energy, since this would involve an intolerable interference with the internal life of particular nations. The essence of the plan proposed is to assign to an international authority control of the "dangerous" activities, leaving "safe" activities to be carried out by individual nations.

It is proposed that an international atomic development authority should be set up and should have complete control over

¹ *The International Control of Atomic Energy*. Reprinted by H.M. Stationery Office. 1s.

² Thorium is also fissionable, but can maintain a chain reaction only in combination with uranium.

all supplies of uranium and thorium throughout the world. All mining operations for these materials would be conducted by the authority. All production plants would be under its control. It would also conduct research on a wide scale. The authority must be the best-informed agency in the world on all that relates to atomic energy, so that it will know at once where the line between the intrinsically dangerous and the non-dangerous must at any given time be drawn and, if new processes of releasing atomic energy are discovered, it will be the first to know about them. The Report shows convincingly that inspection is unworkable unless the authority is more than a policing body. It can function effectively only if it possesses the advantage of superior knowledge, and this it will naturally have, if the raw material and the great plants are in its hands. Having "dangerous" activities securely under its own control, the authority would then lease the denatured materials to the nations that wanted them for the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

The property and operations of the authority would be located in different countries so as to maintain a strategic balance between the nations. Thus no one nation would enjoy a marked superiority. If one nation were at any time to seize the plants or stockpiles located in its territory, other nations would have similar facilities and materials within their reach, and would not be placed at a disadvantage, while the act of aggression would provide a timely warning and enable them to take measures of defence.

It is impossible to reproduce in a summary the weight of the arguments by which the Report demonstrates the efficacy of the proposed form of control and the weaknesses of alternative methods.

THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

The proposals submitted by Mr. Bernard Baruch on behalf of the United States Government to the Atomic Energy Commission of the United Nations at its first meeting in June follow the same lines. He urged that an international Atomic Development Authority should be set up, to which should be entrusted all phases of the development and use of atomic energy, starting with raw material and including (1) managerial control or ownership of all atomic energy or activities potentially dangerous to world security, (2) power to control, inspect and license all other atomic activities, (3) the duty of fostering beneficial uses of atomic energy, and (4) research and development-responsibilities of an affirmative character intended to put the Authority in the forefront of atomic knowledge, and thus enable it to detect the misuse of atomic energy.

He further proposed that when an adequate system of control had been agreed upon, the manufacture of atomic bombs should

cease and that existing bombs should be disposed of in accordance with the terms laid down in the agreed treaty. He stated that the United States was prepared (1) to make available at once the information essential to a reasonable understanding of the proposals put forward, (2) when the Authority was created, to join other nations in making available the further information essential for the performance of its functions, and (3) as successive stages in international control were reached, to yield, to the extent required at each stage, national control of atomic activities to the Authority.

At the heart of any security system, Mr. Baruch maintained, lay the certainty of penalties for breaches of the proposed treaty; the issue went straight to the heart of the veto power contained in the Charter of the United Nations. There could be no veto to protect those who violated their solemn agreements not to develop or use atomic energy for destructive purposes. The bomb, he insisted, does not wait on debate ; to delay may be to die.

The Russians at once made it plain that they could not assent to the abolition of the veto and submitted alternative proposals for outlawing atomic warfare and the destruction of existing stocks of bombs. They made it clear, however, that they want the Atomic Energy Commission to "elaborate a system of sanctions for application against the unlawful use of atomic energy, and measures, systems and organizations of control to ensure the observance of conditions for the outlawry of atomic weapons". In the debate in the House of Commons on August 2nd, Mr. Noel-Baker said that the American and Russian representatives on the Atomic Energy Commission had agreed that there was no fundamental clash of principle between the two plans and that His Majesty's Government accepted both and believed that they can be fused.

THE VETO

In the Security Council decisions on all matters other than procedural require the concurring votes of the five permanent members. This provision has come to be known as the privilege of the veto. It is improbable that any one of the Great Powers would be willing in present circumstances to be outvoted on a matter involving its vital interests. It may be regarded as certain that the Russians will not surrender the right of veto ; they would fear a "ganging-up" of a majority of the members of the Security Council against Russia, which might constitute a threat to her security. On the other hand, it is obvious that a policy of control and inspection, operating within the limits agreed on in the treaty, if it were subject to the veto of a particular State, would become unworkable. The crux of the problem is to find a means of establishing an effective form of control without

violating the conditions which Russia regards as essential to her own security. The first step towards finding an answer to this problem is the working out in detail of a scientific and technical plan for the control of atomic energy. Only then will it be possible to judge what powers it is essential to confer on the controlling body to enable it to carry out its functions effectively. It is certain that those powers must be far-reaching because of the impossibility of separating the dangerous and the safe uses of atomic energy, but they will operate in a defined area, and agreement may be reached about their exercise without changing the provisions about voting in the Security Council which were arrived at with great difficulty.

It is a question whether those who regard the abolition of the veto as the main object to be aimed at are on the right track. In the volume of papers by members of the Yale Institute of International Studies, published under the title *The Absolute Weapon*,¹ which is the most sober and penetrating discussion of the whole problem of atomic energy and world order that has yet appeared, it is argued that it is very doubtful whether the abolition of the veto would make any great practical difference. Even though a majority of votes were obtained, there would be the greatest reluctance to proceed to measures of enforcement against a powerful offender.² Mr. Walter Lippman, in a paper in *One World or None*,³ has developed a similar argument with great force. Experience has proved, he maintains, that in the present conditions of the world, an attempt by a group of nations to outvote and, if the decision is not accepted, to coerce, a nation powerful enough to offer effective resistance is bound to fail. The price is too high. The cost of the upholders to law may be as great as to the law-breakers. The real line of advance is not in attempting to coerce sovereign States, but in making individuals liable to penalties for the breach of international agreements. If the nations reach agreement about a system for the control of atomic energy, that agreement will be embodied in a treaty. The treaty ought to include a provision that the nations participating in the treaty will make the rules it lays down part of their own domestic legislation. Scientists, technicians, administrators, military commanders in all countries would then have to comply with the rules. They could not claim the protection of their own Government if they violated them. They could claim the protection of the United Nations if they were coerced by their own Government to do something contrary to the rules. This conception of personal liability underlies the Nuremberg trials.

¹ Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York.

² This view is also closely argued in a pamphlet by Professor P. M. S. Blackett, *The Atom and the Charter*, published by the Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, S.W. 1. 6d.

³ McGraw, Hill Book Co. \$1.

WORLD GOVERNMENT

Many people are coming to think that the only way of escape from the dangers that threaten mankind is the speedy establishment of the world state. These ideas are subjected to rigorous criticism in the Yale volume already mentioned.

If what is contemplated is a *constitutional* world government, such as Mr. Bevin had in mind in his speech a few months ago, not only would the practical difficulties of achieving it on a world scale be enormous, but it would have to be based on the common acceptance of certain fundamental standards and values, and such a community of values at present simply does not exist. If a world government were to come into existence on any other than a constitutional basis, unprecedented power would be placed in the hands of a small group that would not be accountable to any one for their actions. Mankind might find itself in the grip of the worst tyranny it had ever known. Moreover, it is fanciful to suppose that in the present state of the world, it would be within the capacity of any conceivable world government to settle equitably and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned questions to which nations have in the past attached such vital importance that they have been willing to go to war in their defence. The conflict of interests would be as likely to lead to *civil* war as it now is to lead to international war, and we should be no nearer a real solution of our problem.

Mr. Lippman regards his proposal for a universal law which would operate on individuals as a first move towards the creation of a world state, and wants to see the formation of the world state made the principal objective of American policy. But the modest first steps for which he is pleading might stand a better chance of acceptance if the proposal were dissociated from the idea of a world state with all the uncertainties and ambiguities attaching to that conception. Many see in the omniscience of the modern national state a supreme danger to human liberties and would regard the setting up of a vast super-state as a still more terrifying form of tyranny. In actual fact, however, while the powers of the atomic development authority in the sphere assigned to it must be unchallengeable, that sphere would be a strictly limited one, and its functions would be administrative and technical rather than political.

It is forcibly argued in the *New English Weekly* of July 25th that the necessity of dealing with the atomic bomb may under the hand of Providence open up a way of escape out of the vicious circle in which in the political sphere we seem to be caught. There has up to the present seemed to be no way of averting the universal destruction in which competing national sovereignties threaten to involve

us except by merging these sovereignties in a super-state, which would exercise a sovereignty still more absolute and disastrous. But under the new threat we are being forced, it seems, "to erect an authority which, while absolute in its own way, is not and cannot be a government at all. But by its very existence it will take the omnipotence and omnicompetence out of every government." The statement that the new authority would "not be a government at all" goes, perhaps, too far in one direction, just as Mr. Lippman's contention that the adoption of an international law for the control of atomic energy is the first step towards a fully developed world government may go too fast and too far in another. The questions that have been raised are clearly of the first importance, demanding the best constructive thought that can be given to them.

THE CHALLENGE

The present disputes, tensions and rivalries between the Powers offer small ground for hoping that there will be enough wisdom and magnanimity to adopt the measures which are urgently demanded in the interest not only of the welfare, but of the self-preservation of mankind. But, however dark things may appear at the moment, there are two forces at work which must not be under-estimated. First, the urgency of the problem to be solved is an insistent pressure on the minds of men to turn their backs on folly and seek the way of life. Secondly, as the preceding pages show, the gravity of the crisis has already begun to evoke the response of fresh and vigorous political thinking. We may take heart from the fact that the challenge of the atomic bomb should have produced so quickly—in less than eight months—in the Report of the Board of Consultants the response of hard, clear, constructive thought about a problem as difficult and baffling as has ever been thrust suddenly on mankind. Men have not succumbed to fear, but have set themselves with courage and hope to overcome the danger that threatens the life of humanity. Though the ways of Providence transcend our comprehension, such facts as these may remind us that in the chaos which man's pride and wilfulness have created, the goodness and mercy of God are redemptively at work.

Every effort to bring widening areas of human life under the control of public law must have the whole-hearted support of Christians. We must hope, therefore, that the western Governments will be as outspoken and uncompromising as possible in insisting that the new destructive force should be brought under the effective control of public law in the interest of human welfare as a whole. But in exerting themselves to the utmost to achieve this end, it is essential that the western democracies should free themselves from the taint of self-righteousness. However

much we are convinced that in this particular matter what we are standing for is right, this is no ground for assuming that in the conflicts of interest and power which underlie, and are inseparable from, the discussion of these questions, truth and justice are all on one side. In the Christian view all nations alike stand under the judgment of God. All alike are engaged in the pursuit of selfish and material aims which arouse suspicions and fears in the minds of others. In dealing with the problem of atomic energy, the unequivocal assertion of principles which we believe to be valid has to be combined with a persistent endeavour to see things from the Russian standpoint as well as our own.

From the Christian point of view there is much to be said for the tentative and experimental approach to the control of atomic energy to which the preceding discussion points. If the direction and control of world history is in the hands of God, and is a task too great for man's finite powers, there is more to be hoped for from a simple response to God's demands in the historical situation by taking what seems to be the right next step than from putting our faith in far-reaching schemes, the final working out of which cannot be foreseen and may prove to be quite other than what their authors intended.

There can, however, be no half-heartedness or dilatoriness in responding to the demands which the situation makes on us. The period of grace is short. Agreement about a plan of control will become more difficult in proportion as nations equip themselves with a complicated organization and plants for the development of atomic energy and with stockpiles of bombs. By an extraordinary good fortune, moreover, the control of atomic energy, because of the limited supplies of uranium and of the possibility of "denaturing" the fissionable material, seems to be a relatively easy point at which to begin the international control of weapons of mass destruction.

Failure to reach agreement about methods of control is leading to a race in atomic armament. The military staffs are laying their plans for atomic warfare. Mr. Baruch has warned the Atomic Energy Commission that the United States may see no alternative but to go on making bigger and better bombs.

In the attempt to bring atomic energy under effective control a tremendous demand is being made on human morale. How can men be awakened to the full horror of the threat which hangs over mankind without their becoming the victims of panic? Cool heads are necessary to overcome the danger. Measures prompted by fear may precipitate the catastrophe which it is sought to avert.

Scientists and publicists are doing what lies in their power to awaken us. In a recent issue of the *New Yorker* all the usual features were discarded and the entire number given to an account

of what happened at Hiroshima. It is now known that the destructive effects of atomic warfare are not limited to the living, but may extend endlessly to unborn generations. The gamma rays from radio-active atoms have been found to be highly injurious to the reproductive cells, producing sterility and causing damage to the chromosomes, which are the carriers of inheritance, so that the injury may be transmitted to successive generations and in time effect an entire population.

We are told, moreover, on the authority of those in the best position to know, that the atomic bomb is unhappily not the only, nor even perhaps the greatest, threat to the continuance of civilized existence. There are even more terrifying dangers to be feared from chemical and bacteriological warfare.

It is easy in such a situation to succumb to a feeling of helplessness. What the individual in this country can do to influence decisions in these matters seems negligible, more particularly since it is the attitudes of Russia and America that will be decisive. But where the whole future of mankind is at stake, none of us can divest himself of responsibility. We have to take into our hearts and minds and prayers the torment of the world. We have to do what in us lies to create an informed, intelligent, sane public opinion. We cannot tell in what unseen ways it may please God to use our humble efforts, in combination with those of others, to turn aside the destruction which threatens to overwhelm his creation.

It is certain that no immediate removal of the danger can be looked for. This means that for many years to come we must live in the midst of uncertainties and on the brink of an abyss. To live under these conditions we shall need a kind of spiritual nonchalance. Nonchalance, in its literal meaning of absence of warmth, is not wholly the right word. What we need, rather, is a supernatural intensity of effort, having as its source the rest and peace of mind which is the possession of those who know that the issues are not in their hands and that all things are ordered by a love and power in which they can wholly trust. •

J. H. O.

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